

PSY 311(01) - Controversial Issues in Psychology

TH 12:00 – 3:20 AuSable Hall 2310

Spring 2019

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 to 11:50 and by appointment.

E-mail: Please be aware that I may not respond to email inquiries that involve information that has already been covered in the syllabus or in class.

*This syllabus is subject to change. Changes (if any) will be announced in class or posted on Blackboard. Students are responsible for keeping informed of any such notices.

Course Description:

This course aims to introduce you to a number of issues and controversies in psychology; it is also designed to teach critical thinking on a broader level. When confronted with contradictory information, differing opinions and points of view, it is necessary to have and work on improving your ability to comprehend and evaluate available sources and material. The use of such “critical thinking skills” can have a profound impact upon one’s life in terms of academic, professional, and personal success.

SWS Course: The GVSU handbook states: “*Courses that have received the SWS designation are not merely courses that require written assignments; they adhere to certain guidelines. Students turn in a total of at least 3,000 words of writing during the term. Part of that total may be essay exams, but a substantial amount of it is made up of finished essays or reports or research papers. The instructor works with the students on revising drafts of their papers, rather than simply grading the finished piece of writing. At least four hours of class time are devoted to writing instruction. For a three-credit course at least 1/3 of the final grade is based upon the writing assignments.*” It is GVSU policy that you must receive a grade of C or better in this course in order to get SWS credit. A C- will not do.

Course Objectives: This class does not merely address specific controversial issues, but is also designed to teach critical thinking on a broader level. The course is also an SWS course. Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:

Objective 1: Identify areas of psychological controversy and evaluate supporting arguments based on empirical findings.

Objective 2: Demonstrate critical thinking skills (analyzing the arguments of other people and forming one’s own reasoned judgment).

Objective 3: Research and express ideas clearly in a written and oral format

Class Format:

Classes will be a mixture of discussion, group debates, and some lecture. You will be expected to read and write **extensively**. Only important points from the reading may be emphasized in lecture format. The readings for this class are often difficult and will require you to read the material twice or three times. Make sure you will allocate the necessary time for this! At many times, discussion will center on sensitive and complicated issues, which may involve deeply held beliefs and opinions. Feel free to disagree with and challenge each other’s opinions and statements, but do so in a respectful way that focuses on the issues, not the individuals.

Materials for class:

No textbooks are required. Most of the reading material will be available in pdf or word files that can be downloaded from Blackboard. For some topics, copies of the readings will be provided in class by the instructor.

Course Outcome Measures:

Your final grade will be based on the total number of points that you receive on two exams (one midterm and one final), debates, one major paper, bi-weekly questions, and participation points.

Exams: Each exam consists of essay questions drawn **from lectures, readings, class discussions, and in-class videos**. Make-up exams will not be given unless there is a family emergency or a severe personal health problem. In such cases, please notify me by phone or email BEFORE the scheduled exam time. Make-up exams will be different than those given during regular class time.

Paper (more detailed instructions will be discussed in class): this will be on a topic of the student's own choosing of a controversial issue in psychology (these topics will be cleared with the instructor first unless students choose a topic from the list provided by the instructor). You will be graded on the quality of your writing as well as the content of your arguments and the selected texts. We will spend a significant amount of class time covering content and format of the paper. You will be asked to submit a rough draft worth several points (10 out of 65).

A paper is penalized five percentage point for every day it is late (papers submitted after 11:59PM of the due date are already considered late papers). This penalty will be routinely assessed, *regardless of the reason for its lateness*. The only exception is illness, mental or physical, where a licensed health practitioner writes a note indicating the reason for the lateness. **No late work will be accepted one week after its due date!**

Debates: we will have 2 in-class debates this semester (each will be worth 5 points). More details in class. In order to get any points, you have to be present in class and participate actively.

Questions Submission: In order to facilitate our discussions, you are expected to write and bring to class three questions about the readings every time a set of readings has been assigned for that day. The questions you compose should both (a) demonstrate that you have thought about the readings, and (b) be designed to stimulate potentially interesting discussion of the topics at hand. Your questions will be collected in the beginning of the class and will contribute to your participation points. Depending on the quality of your questions, you may receive 0, 1 or 2 points (8 topics X 2 = 16 points max.). I will not accept questions sent via e-mail.

Participation points (8 points max.): Students can earn one point per topic by showing extra critical thinking initiative: finding information, correcting an argument in class or generally going above and beyond in terms of class participation or discussion of *relevant* material.

Grading Scale

			Final Grade	
	Points	Percentage	A	94 - 100%
Midterm Exam	50	26.18%	A-	90 – 93%
Final Exam	50	26.18%	B+	87- 89%
Debates (2 X 5)	10	5.24%	B	84- 86%
Final paper	65	34.03%	B-	80 – 83%
Questions Submissions (8 X 2)	16	08.37%	C+	77 – 79%
Total	191	100.0%	C	74- 76%
			C-	70 – 73%
			D+	67- 69%
			D	60 - 66%
			F	59% and lower

** This is a tentative syllabus, including the grading scale

Class Attendance:

Attendance will not be taken. BUT, you will be expected to come to every class, prepared to ask questions and discuss issues. Participating in group discussions, and reading assigned materials before and after class are crucial to getting a good grade and learning something from this class. If you are unable to attend class, make sure to find out what has been covered in class (from your classmates, NOT FROM THE INSTRUCTOR). Students are responsible for checking Blackboard each time before class for announcements.

Please turn off your cell phone in class and use your laptops only for class purposes!!

Integrity of Scholarship and Grades: All academic work will be done by the student to whom it was assigned. Anyone caught cheating (e.g., procuring, providing or accepting any materials which contain questions or answers to any exam or assignment, submitting work that has been previously graded) or plagiarizing (taking ideas or material from another source for either written or oral presentation without acknowledging the original source) will be dropped from the course, given an F, and referred to the University for further action. Cheating is a serious violation of academic integrity. For more information on academic honesty please see the GVSU student code <http://www.gvsu.edu/studentcode/section-4-academic-integrity-of-grades-and-scholarship-73.htm>

This course is subject to the GVSU policies listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>.

Writing center:

This is one resource for those students who feel that they need more assistance with their writing skills. They offer free peer consulting services in writing and a walk-in center for students with papers, *particularly in SWS courses*.

Additional Thoughts:

As you cover the readings for class, share your thoughts with others during class, complete your assignments, I urge you to pay attention to how you've come to hold the beliefs that you have. What sources of knowledge do you use to support your beliefs? How do you respond to evidence or arguments that question a belief that you hold? What do you do when you recognize contradictions among some of your beliefs? When do you find that it makes sense to change a belief? These are all important questions to consider...

Tentative Class Schedule

	Topic	Readings
Week 1 May 7 and 9	Tu: Course Overview Instructions for Paper Th: Do adults repress childhood sexual abuse? Is the concept of repressed and recovered memories valid? Video “Divided Memories”	No readings Kluft & Loftus 104-122, Tavis, APA link
Week 2 May 14 and 16	Tu: Debate#1: Effective & beneficial parental discipline methods (spanking, time-out, etc.) Th: How to raise children with a “growth mindset”: does praising help?	Gershoff et al., 2010; Gershoff, 2013; + websites (add more) Henderlong & Lepper 774–795, Kohn 24-30, Dweck, 2015
Week 3 May 21 and 23	Tu: Gay Parenting: Healthy for Children? Th: In-class Documentary Paper Rough draft, Part 1 due May 23	
Week 4 May 28 and 30	Tu, May 28: Midterm Exam Th: Religion and prosocial behavior: a positive link?	Galen (2012); Myers (2012) and Saroglou (2012)
Week 5 June 4 and 6	Tu: Nature/Nurture: Human Violence Th: Debate #2 Nature/Nurture: Should adolescents who commit serious offenses be tried and convicted as adults? Drop Deadline - grade W – June 7	Caspi et al., 2002; Fergusson et al., 2011; Raine et al., 2010; Documentary “Mind of a rampage killer” Steinberg, 2009; Fischer et al.; Steinberg’s response, + Documentary, <i>When kids get life</i>
Week 6 June 11 and 13	Tu: Innate talents – reality or myth? In-class Paper Discussion, Part 2 Th: Critical thinking: Suggestions Final Paper due June 16 Final Exam: Tuesday, June 18	Howe, Davidson, & Sloboda (1998) 339-442